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J. EDGAR HOOVER AND THE FBI

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He sits, relaxed, behind his polished mahogany U.S. government-issue desk, flanked by a pair of brass pistol lamps, and speaks in his gruff policeman's voice, a ruddy-faced man with the kind of seamed and cross-hatched visage one might associate with an amiable retired prizefighter, now doing quite well, thank you, with his Steak and Choppe House across the street from Madison Square Garden. Age has blurred the bulldog handsomeness of his prime, and puffed the eyelids. But the brown eyes still smolder, and the aura of jut-jawed pugnacity lingers on. He gives the impression of great gentleness, yet great strength, not quite masked by an almost opaque inscrutability. On the desk is a small brass plaque, inscribed with his favorite motto: "Two feet on the ground are worth one in the mouth."

This is J. Edgar Hoover, 69, top cop, nemesis of the wicked, spy catcher extraordinary, the Inspector Javert of meticulously counted legions of Commies, crooks, kooks, desperadoes, kidnapers, and other aromatic fauna of the nation's underworld. As director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, he is custodian of the darkest secrets of millions of Americans, great and small. He is also, beyond the shadow of a doubt, an authentic folk hero—a fiercely dedicated public servant who in 40 years of service has transformed his beloved FBI into the most respected, feared, and incorruptible police force in U.S. history.

But suddenly J. Edgar Hoover has become a figure of controversy—not merely to longtime leftist critics but among old admirers who wonder whether he has forgotten the motto on his desk. One such disenchanted fan is Lyndon B. Johnson, who had decided by last week that he must find a new chief of the FBI.

It was a tough decision—and doubly tough to carry out. Hoover is still a formidable old icon. The President himself signed an Executive order last May

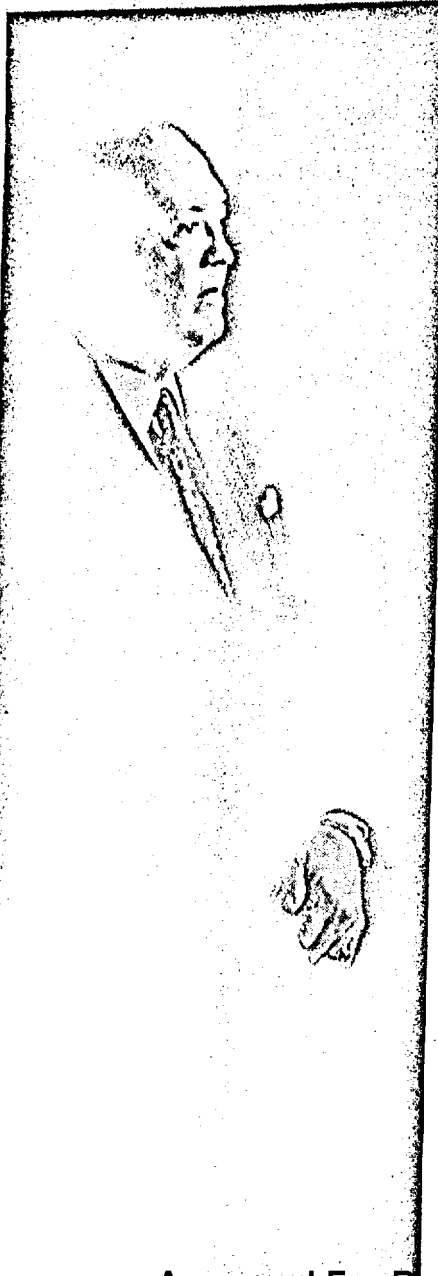
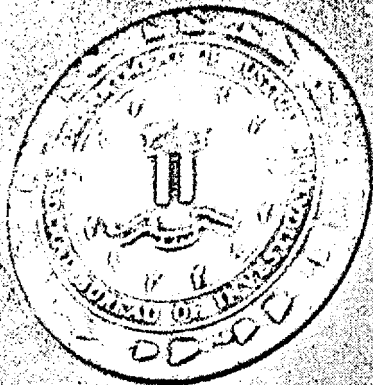
the compulsory retirement that would take effect on Hoover's 70th birthday next Jan. 1; he assured the FBI boss that he could stay on "as long as I am in the White House." Even tougher perhaps is the task of finding a worthy replacement, who, as the White House sees it, must be neither a politician nor an LBJ crony nor a present FBI executive, but someone as irreproachable as a respected judge, preferably a Federal judge. The search is on.

In his first press conference in two months, President Lyndon B. Johnson walked a tightrope last week in the feud between Hoover and Negro leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. And, by comparison with his own past encomiums, he seemed to damn the FBI director with faint praise.

"My problem," the President said, "is to try to prevent strong divisions . . . instead of provoke them. We are very anxious that each person receive the protections of the law in this country . . . Mr. Hoover has been called upon by the President and by many others . . . to do work in this field . . . He has been diligent and rather effective, and I would hope that in the months ahead we would have further evidence of the outstanding capacity of his people, and that this would not degenerate into a battle of personalities."

Strangely, Hoover's sudden weakness developed in an area of his greatest strength: public relations. It is many years since he has led a raid, but he has been coming on like gangbusters in his public utterances—and for two of his major blasts, he chose targets that, each in its own way, are as prestigious an institution as J. Edgar Hoover.

Capstone? First he issued an angry denunciation of the Warren commission for its relatively mild criticism of the FBI's role in the events preceding President Kennedy's assassination. Though he is notoriously thin-skinned to any criticism, Hoover's grievances lay even deeper. He thought the Warren com-



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